

Greenbrier Division of the Chesapeake and Ohio Railway

The Greenbrier Division was the branch line of the Chesapeake and Ohio Railway that served the Greenbrier Valley of Greenbrier and Pocahontas Counties. Unlike most C&O branch lines in West Virginia, which were built into the coal producing areas of the state, the Greenbrier line was constructed to provide transportation for the development of the vast timber resources in the valley. This timber was well known in the post Civil War period, but protected from harvest by a lack of transportation. The white pine was removed, beginning in 1874, by using the river to move logs to a sawmill in Ronceverte, but most of the timber required rail service to be harvested.

There were numerous plans to build railroads into the Greenbrier Valley in the years following the Civil War but it required the completion of the C&O across the state in 1873 and actions by the West Virginia Pulp and Paper Company in the late 1890s to get a railroad constructed into the valley. The paper company built a new paper mill at Covington, Virginia, and acquired timber land on Cheat Mountain to provide the needed pulp wood. These events gave the C&O promise of sufficient business to cause it to justify the building of the Greenbrier Division.

Construction started in July 1899 and the track was completed to WVP&PCo's new town of Cass in December 1900. Shipment of pulpwood began in January 1901 and the Cass sawmill began operation a year later. Construction on the rail line continued and was completed to Durbin in 1902 and to Winterburn, on the East Fork of the Greenbrier, in 1905. Final length was 100.96 miles. At Durbin a junction was made in 1903 with the Coal and Iron Railroad (later part of the Western Maryland Railway).

Hauling the production from the numerous sawmills and two tanneries that were quickly located along the new railroad and serving the new sawmill towns, the existing communities, and the agricultural industry of the valley made the Greenbrier Division a busy one for freight and passengers. Passenger service was provided by two trains daily each way.

By the early 1920s the original timber in the valley had almost all been cut and trucks and automobiles were beginning to impact railroad traffic. However, this decade was one of the busiest on the line. As local traffic decreased, the C&O began using the Greenbrier line as part of a new routing for shipments of freight between eastern and western cities.

The Depression saw the end of the through freight trains and the closing of almost all the remaining on-line industries. Passenger service was reduced to one train each way in 1930 and the Bartow-Winterburn section was abandoned in 1933.

The World War II period was the final busy years on the Greenbrier line. Trains of through freight cars returned and wartime restrictions brought people back to the passenger trains.

Following the war the decline in traffic resumed. Passenger service

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ended on January 8, 1958, and freight service was reduced over the years from daily to one train a week in 1974. The closings of the Cass mill in 1960 and the Marlinton tannery in 1970 made the line's future doubtful. In 1975 the C&O requested permission from the Interstate Commerce Commission to abandon it Greenbrier Branch. Authority to abandon was granted in 1978 and the last trains ran on December 27 and 28.

The right-of-way was donated by the railroad to the state of West Virginia. The section between North Caldwell and Cass has become the Greenbrier River Trail.

The Western Maryland line into Durbin operated for a short time longer but in 1984 it was also abandoned.